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Government, higher education and the national economy

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Introduction

Flanders is a part of Belgium. This simple fact has complex consequences when we look at the educational policy in Flanders and Belgium over the last 20 years. Much of what happened in that period, or didn't happen, can be explained by the attention that was paid to, and the consequences of measures in other fields, namely the state reform and the economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, the consequences of the School Pact (see below) lasted for a long time.

Before we turn our attention to specific aspects of the educational policy since the 1970s, it is necessary to focus on some more general political developments in Belgium and Flanders.

1. The unitary Belgian state

Belgian society and politics traditionally were influenced by three cleavages. In the social and economic field, labour and capital stood against each other. Concerning language, there were tensions between Dutch speaking and French speaking. On the ideological field, Catholics and freethinkers were opponents. These groups often were diametrically opposed to each other and that was a potential threat to the stability of the Belgian state. But the political parties, their members and related organisations were all internally split up by these cleavages. When they were opponents in one field, they were partners in another. Perhaps paradoxically, these many cuttings made the search for an equilibrium possible. The procedure that was followed, is called pacification democracy.

Pacification is based on the principle that one party or group can never take decisions alone or impose them to another party or group. In other words, the majority cannot rule. On the contrary, an agreement, a compromise is sought, more or less acceptable for all partners concerned. It is a process of give and take, often also of giving by the government to all parties. Establishing a compromise is done by an elite, that discretely searches a solution that can be accepted by everyone. This often leads to complex results, a complex exchange operation embedded in protective measures. Policy problems are neutralised by turning them into technical exchange questions.

Each of these cleavages alternately (though not in the same amount) dominated the political agenda. For example in the fifties, the ideological tensions (the School War, see below) pushed the socio-economic and linguistic tensions to the background. Temporary, the coalitions around the theme of ideology were intensified, detrimental

to the ties of solidarity around the other themes. After the signing of the School Pact the other cleavages became manifest again. This scenario of increasing and decreasing tension happened time and time again in each of the three domains. Looking for consensus and compromise thus became a dominant characteristic of Belgian politics. After the Second World War the relative stability of the pacification democracy was disturbed a number of times. On those moments, when the different cleavages converged, the political system was in crisis. They also made it clear that Belgium consists in fact of two nations, differing in mentality, opinions, and way of life.

Until around 1965 the three cleavages are markedly present. The last big battle in the ideological field was the School War (*Schoolstrijd*), a war fought in the fifties between freethinkers and religious. The main issues were the subsidising of the free education and the control over the state education. The government between 1950 and 1954 consisted only of Catholics. It worked out a favourable financial settlement for free (that is Catholic) education. Moreover, it tried to control the (neutral) state education by establishing mixed commissions. These commissions, made up of an equal number of representatives of free and state education, would be granted advisory authority over the curricula, the establishment of state schools and the recognition of free schools. In 1954 a Socialist-Liberal government was formed, which would last until 1958. It started a counter-attack: it dismissed 110 teachers with a 'free' diploma in state schools, made the financing of free schools dependent on a number of criteria, abolished the mixed commissions, and granted the state the right to establish state schools.

During the whole period of 1950 to 1958 the respective measures were attacked by all possible parliamentary and extra-parliamentary means. None of both parties accepted the dictate of the other. After the elections of 1958, that gave neither party an absolute majority, one realised that this stalemate could only be avoided when a compromise would be reached.

That compromise was not reached in parliament. It were the political parties, more precisely three Catholic, three Socialist, and three Liberal politicians, who worked out an agreement, outside the parliament, regardless of the pressure groups, far away from the public opinion. In November 1958 they signed the School Pact (*Schoolpact*), that was approved by all political parties and turned into a law in 1959.

The agreement was that on the basis of the free choice of the parents, the state was granted the right to establish schools and free education was granted the right to be

subsidised. This 'armed peace' (Huyse, 1986) could be made, because the state was generous for both opponents as far as funding was concerned. This way of making compromises has been described as "an almost genius formula: master in the own house and the house paid by the community" (Van Doorn, quoted in Huyse, 1986).

With the pacification of the ideological cleavage, the other fields of tension could now become manifest again. In the winter of 1960-1961 the socio-economic troubles showed in the strike against the law on economic recovery (*Eenheidswet*). The linguistic cleavage appeared in the reactions against the language laws. At the end of the sixties, a linguistic problem would even bring a government to resign: the issue of Leuven.

The Belgian episcopacy wanted to extend the French speaking part of the university of Leuven (UCL) in the Dutch speaking province of Vlaams-Brabant. For the Flemish Movement and the Flemish students this was unacceptable. The consequence was a mass protest. But the government Van Den Boeynants refused to bring the UCL to the French speaking province of Waals-Brabant. Therefore, the ministers of the Christian party (CVP) resigned. The next (Catholic-Socialist) government Eyskens settled the conflict, by providing the necessary money for the transfer of the UCL and by compensating this for the freethinkers by financing also the division of the university of Brussels in a Dutch speaking and a French speaking part. Later on the Catholic 'Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis' was divided too.

In the meantime, the demand for autonomy was raised with more strength both in Flanders and Wallonia. Wallonia suffered from an economic weakening, caused by the international competition, but mostly because the industrial infrastructure was outdated. The feeling that the Belgian structures did not allow to meet the Walloon economic needs, increased the demand for economic autonomy (in regions). In Flanders there was a demand for cultural and linguistic autonomy (in communities). Gradually this resulted in a broader demand for political and socio-economic equal treatment for the Flemish people, because they were disadvantaged in the past.

The three cleavages -ideological, socio-economic, and linguistic- merged to two new opposites: Flanders and Wallonia. The mostly Catholic Flanders got new investments and innovative initiatives, and wanted to translate its demographic majority in political power. In contrast, Wallonia was weakening economically. The power of the

French speaking decreased, except in Brussels. The Walloon freethinking also lost part of its force. These groups also wanted to secure their positions.

It seemed that granting autonomy to parts within the Belgian state would be a solution for the tensions that had dominated society for so long.

2. Difficult federalisation in a period of economic crisis

In the 1970s and 1980s the unitary Belgian state was transformed into a federal state, consisting of three Communities and three Regions. In that way both the Flemish demand for cultural autonomy and the Walloon demand for economic autonomy were met.

In the same period the economic crisis struck hard. Unemployment grew fast and inflation increased rapidly. Also because of a weak and late reaction of the government, the public debt increased dramatically. The retrenchment policy was a priority on the political agenda, next to the state reform.

The basis for the federalisation was laid with the state reform of 1970 (only the third change of the Constitution in Belgian history). On 18 February 1970 prime-minister G. Eyskens declared: "The unitary state, with its structure and working-method, as it is now regulated by the law, has been overtaken by the events." As a compromise between Flemish and Walloon demands, the proposition was to establish three Communities and three Regions, that each would take over part of the authority of the national state. The three Communities were given the authority over the use of language and the cultural policy, including education, but except the so-called School Pact competencies (everything concerning school peace, compulsory education, educational structures, diplomas, subsidies, wages, and school population norms). That not more competencies were transferred, was caused by the fear of freethinkers for discrimination of state education in Flanders, and the fear of Catholics for discrimination of free education in Wallonia.

The image of the 1970s was strongly influenced by the deep economic crisis due to the oil problems in 1973 and 1978. Because of the increasing interest rates and the decreasing economic growth, the government could no longer finance its expenses by contracting debts. A strict retrenchment policy was necessary. But on the other side the recession caused the bankruptcy of many firms and the number of unemployed

increased rapidly. The generous welfare system caused an increase in expenses for unemployment benefits. This situation has been called 'stagflation': on the one hand governmental investments are necessary to boost the economy (and employment), on the other hand combating inflation requires a strict limitation of expenses, even if this means growing unemployment. In both cases public expenditure increases, in both cases the public debt increases. And that is exactly what has happened.

These negative developments were reinforced by the instability of the successive governments (see annex 3). Many governments fell over linguistic problems. Moreover a price had to be paid for resolving these problems: the pacification democracy resulted in the so-called politics of the waffle iron (*wafelijzerpolitiek*). Dossiers of both parts of the country were linked to each other and this led to unnecessary expenses.

In the 1980s it becomes clear that this situation cannot longer be maintained. In 1981 the public debt amounted 13 % of the GNP, an absolute record. Hence the governments of the Christian-Democrat W. Martens pursued a retrenchment policy in all policy fields, including education. Universities as well as colleges received less funding. Other than financial matters were not a policy issue. In this whole period, little happened in the field of higher education. According to Verhoeven (1982) only four aspects were a matter of policy concern: "Legislation about universities was limited to four areas: (1) the organisation of the state universities; (2) stipulations of subjects taught for 'statutory degrees'; (3) financial provisions for universities; and (4) appropriations for scholarships and bursaries."

The 'second round' of the state reform (in 1980) could not bring a new dynamism to higher educational policy. The Communities became responsible for cultural and person-related matters. For education this meant no big difference, only pre-school, after-school, and out-of-school education were transferred.

The state reform remained uncompleted. Among other things the lack of financial autonomy for the state-parts and continuing language disputes made a 'third round' unavoidable.

3. Autonomy for Flanders

The 'third round' of the state reform is the (provisional?) end of the reform of the

remodelling of the Belgian state. In three phases the structure and the competencies both of the national (federal) level and the sub-national levels were adapted and rearranged. In the first phase (1988) a lot of new competencies were transferred to the Communities and the Regions. In that way, the Communities received the authority over education (except the duration of compulsory education, the minimal conditions for granting diplomas, and pension plans). This was possible because the guarantees of the School Pact were entered in the Constitution. For education this was the dawn of a new area. Ideas that had been lingering in Flanders for a long time, could now be carried out.

In the next two phases, among other things the national institutions were reformed and the distribution of financial resources over all parts of the state was settled. Also the Arbitration Court (see below) was granted the right to check legislative initiatives with the Constitutional articles concerning the principle of equality, the principle of injunction of discrimination, and the principle of freedom of and the right to education. In that way the guarantees of the School Pact could be guarded.

Flanders wanted to do different and better than Belgium. The Flemish minister-president G. Geens declared on 8 November 1988: "We shall have to prove the current and the future generations that what we do ourselves, we do better" and "The Flemish policy institutions must prove in this new structure that, thanks to the full autonomy in such a vital sector for our Community as the education of our youth, in Flanders a different method can be applied" (Vlaamse Raad, Stuk 19 (1988-89) nr. 1). This other method showed in the first place in a political agreement, reached by the four major political parties (Christian-Democrats (CVP), Social-Democrats (SP), Liberals (PVV), and Flemish Nationalists (VU)). Thereupon followed several decrees (Flemish laws), that gave legal status to the agreement. These decrees reformed all sectors of education, with autonomy, responsibility and scaling-up as leading ideas.

Chapter 1. Policies and programmes at national level

In this chapter, we describe the policy goals and the policy instruments of the Flemish higher educational policy. We focus on the period after 1989, because before that time no clearly stated policy was pursued with regard to the adjustment of higher education to the needs of the economy.

1.1. Traditional degree programmes

The Flemish government considers it necessary to improve the quality of courses at universities and colleges. This is important, according to the government, because of the rise of the knowledge society and the internationalisation of higher education. Intermediate goals are: the transparency of the university course supply, the rationalisation and optimisation of the course supply, the system of quality control, and the improvement of the pass rates.

The transparency of the university course supply

The nontransparency of the university course supply makes it difficult for potential employers to know which knowledge and skills graduates possess. Next to this, the lack of transparency can cause problems for potential students who want to make a rational choice of study. More general, a lack of transparency results in an inadequate link between higher education courses and the labour market (Van Heffen & Huisman, 1998).

The Flemish government finds the improvement of the transparency of the university course supply very important, as is shown in the decision of minister of Education Van Den Bossche (1998). The minister of Education wants to improve this transparency in three ways:

1. Promote the uniformity of courses and diplomas as far as the structure and the content are concerned (i.e. the division in study years and study points, the formal requirements for obtaining a diploma), without interfering with the institutional autonomy of the universities with regard to the curriculum.
2. Rearrange courses in science fields or study domains. The possibility of developing new courses in a specific study domain will only be granted after a decision of an independent commission. This commission will base its decision on three criteria: the institution must have 1) a basis of scientific research, 2) expertness, and 3) a quantitatively and qualitatively sufficient number of staff. The government confirms the list of courses which each institution can offer.

3. Increase the uniformity with international systems and the international recognition of diplomas. The structure of university courses will be rearranged, so as to offer basic academic courses and introductions in the fields of study of the second year of the course in the first cycle, an actual specialisation in the second cycle, and professional training, specialisation or a multidisciplinary training in the third cycle (Van Den Bossche, 1998:5).

The instruments used to achieve these goals are mainly organisation and law. The instrument of organisation can be seen in the planned establishment of an independent commission. Law is used for example in the rearrangement of the structure of the university courses. Through (legal) prescriptions the government tries to incite higher education institutions to a certain behaviour.

Rationalisation and optimisation of the course supply

The Flemish government considers it important to increase the rationality of the course supply in higher education, because Flemish higher education must be competitive in an international context. This rationalisation and optimisation goal includes seven elements: 1) new programmes and courses; 2) improvement of existing programmes; 3) merger of colleges; 4) more polyvalent first cycles and more specialised cycles afterwards; 5) rejecting inferior courses; 6) 'freeze' and abolish courses; 7) integrate courses.

1. New programmes and courses

Examples of new programmes and courses which meet the demands and wishes of the labour market, are the many 'master studies' developed by the universities, e.g. Master of Business Administration. A similar development has occurred in colleges. Colleges offer courses which meet the demand in certain sectors (e.g. transport, public relations, electromechanics) for training with a strong professional orientation. Another example of the way in which higher education tries to cope with the needs of society is the interfaculty programme '*Initiatie tot Ondernemen*' (Initiation to Entrepreneurship), offered at KU Leuven since 1997. This programme teaches students of the second and the third cycle in which ways innovative entrepreneurship is possible. A number of colleges is taught by entrepreneurs (they also play a role in the exams). A third and last example is the intention to establish a course in public

administration within the study domain of political and social sciences.

It exceeds the purpose of this study to describe all programmes and courses established by universities and colleges to meet societal demand. What is important, is to know whether or not these initiatives have been influenced directly or indirectly by government policy. Although a direct influence (like a conditional subsidy) is not always present, we argue that the role of the government must not be underestimated. Firstly, it has given the higher education institutions the freedom to develop such initiatives. Secondly, the Flemish government has stimulated universities and colleges to be more entrepreneurial and dynamic by indicating in which way higher education should develop (information in policy letters and so on). The policy letters do not contain clear obligations, but they measure out the direction to be followed by the universities and the colleges.

2. Improvement of existing programmes

With respect to the improvement of existing programmes, the (legal) obligation for colleges to include a period of practical training in the last year of the course must be pointed out. Next to this, the government tries to incite universities and colleges to make improvements through the already mentioned policy letters. Furthermore, there is an obligation for colleges to draw up vocational profiles and course profiles (see also paragraph 1.3.).

3. Merger of colleges

In the occupational fields which take up college graduates, there was dissatisfaction with the fragmentation of colleges and courses. Also within the college sector this situation was not satisfactory for everybody. In 1994 the Flemish government changed the financing system of the colleges. Instead of earmarked funds a lump-sum financing system was established, that gave the colleges much freedom in using the money. But because this financing system was partly based on the number of students, it resulted in a merger of colleges (from 163 to 29). The minimal size of a college, necessary to be eligible for subsidy, and the minimal number of students required in courses at several places of residence, make co-operation necessary. The amalgamations and the stipulations in the decrees of the fields of study in which courses can be offered, have improved the transparency of the course supply

considerably.

4. More polyvalent first cycles and more specialised cycles afterwards

More polyvalent first cycles and more specialisation afterwards will be aimed at by increasing the uniformity with international systems (see above).

5. Rejecting inferior courses

The Flemish minister of Education has stated several times (see for example Van Den Bossche, 1995 and 1998) that the idea of a 'full' university is outdated. The traditional way of thinking, in which each institution tries to complete its supply of courses horizontally or vertically, cannot longer be maintained. Instead, universities must strive to become 'valuable'. In other words: they have to become centres of excellence in education and research. As a consequence of this concept of a valuable university, the universities should not keep qualitatively inferior courses. However, no direct policy instrument to achieve this goal is formulated. Here again the Flemish government seems to 'manage by speech', a technique that it seems to use often towards higher education.

Colleges can replace an option on a course by another option. After the evaluation and from the academic year 1999-2000 onwards, each college can also replace a basic course for another basic course in a study domain in which it may offer courses. Both possibilities, which grant the colleges the authority to replace an inferior or less successful option or course by a better one, are established by decree.

6. 'Freeze' and abolish courses

To arrive at a more rational and well-balanced supply of courses, the Flemish government conferred with the rectors of the universities. They have agreed (possibly) on 'freezing' a number of university courses, that is abolishing them but with the possibility of re-establishing them. The following example illustrates this: "In the study field of Philosophy and Morality the courses of candidate in Philosophy at KUB and KULAK are being frozen. The existing research capacity can, when necessary, be valorised by establishing a philosophical centre in the History course" (Van Den Bossche, 1998: 7-8).

7. Integrate courses

Again in consultation with the university rectors, the Flemish government has proposed to integrate certain courses. The first actual realisation in this context is the partial integration of the courses Theology and Religious Science at KU Leuven.

More general, the instruments used by the Flemish government to stimulate a more rational and well-balanced supply of courses are law, money, and information. Of these instruments particularly information seems to be an important instrument, because of the autonomy of the higher education institutions. The Flemish governments way of policy making is a variant of the well-known managerial technique of 'management by speech' or 'management by objectives'. This is based on the idea that when one firmly sets the course, the others will follow. But as is clear from the above, the Flemish government also uses other types of instruments. The clearest example is the new financing system for the colleges, that, together with the colleges decree, has put the non-university sector on an entirely new track. Lastly we have to remark that a number of policy measures with regard to the university course supply will be taken after consultation with the rectors. A better example of the new steering model of the Flemish government (see paragraph 3.2.) is hard to find.

Quality control

The universities decree of 1991 introduced a threefold quality control system. The institutions themselves are responsible for the internal quality control. Through visitations an external quality control is carried out. A further external control is the meta-evaluation carried out by the government. To make sure that the evaluations and visitations have a positive impact on the optimisation of the university course supply, a change of the system is forthcoming. This change concerns the following (Van Den Bossche, 1998: 9):

- a more international composition of the visitation commissions (now only Dutch professors are in these commissions);
- next to the evaluation of the quality of education, the quality of the research basis has to be evaluated in visitations too;
- the evaluation must be more clear: for certain criteria for evaluation or fields of quality a classification in categories must be possible, although this does not mean a ranking of courses or institutions;
- to guarantee a follow-up of the evaluations, there will be an obligation to report

about the measures being taken as a result of the evaluation;

- when the follow-up is insufficient and quality remains inferior, successive sanctions must be possible, ranging from a warning to redrawing the authority to offer education in the field under evaluation;

- there must be an evaluation procedure for academic staff.

For colleges a comparable system is established. Colleges are also obliged to carry out an internal quality control. The external evaluation through visitations has not yet been established. The meta-evaluation by the government is still limited to courses of one cycle. These are evaluated through the old system of inspection, that is a careful examination of the school as a whole by a team of inspectors and experts, aiming at pointing out the strong and weak features of the course.

Improving pass rates

Another intermediate goal of the Flemish government to enhance the quality of higher education is the improvement of the pass-rates, especially in the first year. For this reason it has included an article in the decree on universities of 1991, which imposes that 5 % of all auxiliary staff has to work at guidance for first year students. In the policy letter of Van Den Bossche of 1995 it is stated in this context that higher education institutions have to maintain existing guidance systems for (new) students, and that more attention must be paid to course selection counselling in secondary education, this in line with the ten-point programme of the late minister of Education Coens (see Verhoeven & Beuselinck, 1996: 51). Next to this, it is deemed necessary to enhance the transition from secondary to higher education. The audit commission Mertens however has put into question the guidance systems in higher education (Auditcommissie, 1998). It questions especially the extensive guidance in the first year, because a large number of students still does not pass, in spite of the guidance system. The consequences of these remarks for the policy of the Flemish government are not yet clear.

Access to higher education

Free access to all forms of higher education is a long standing tradition in Belgium and Flanders. Since the Omnivalence Law (*Omnivalentiewet*) of 1964 everybody with a secondary education diploma has access to higher education. An exception is made

for secondary vocational education. This only gives access to higher education when an additional (seventh) year is passed successfully.

The democratisation of higher education has been, as in other Western European countries, an important topic. The results of the democratisation in the 1970s are still noticeable (e.g. the spread of universities throughout the provinces). Free access is a major goal of the Flemish government. This free access is promoted through the system of grants and the restriction of tuition fees, but is limited on the other hand by the establishment of some entrance exams.

The system of study grants

Flemish students can receive a study grant when the income of their parents does not exceed a certain limit (dependent on the number of chargeable persons). The amount of the grant varies with the income height. The study grants have been adapted to the increase of the prices annually since 1994-1995. In the future this adaptation will take place automatically.

23 % of the students receive direct financial support (De Groof & Van Haver, 1995: 46). On average they receive 48,982 BEF (department of Education, 1998). Students who are liable for a grant, can also enjoy other advantages. Their parents can get a child allowance (until the student is 25 years old) and can enjoy a tax reduction. The students get reduced fees on public transportation and can use the welfare facilities of the universities and the colleges. They get a reduction on enrolment fees.

Restriction to tuition fees

In the decrees minimum and maximum amounts are fixed for tuition fees. The (non-indexed) amounts are 2,500 and 10,000 BEF for colleges, 10,000 and 14,500 BEF for universities. For post-graduate courses the amount is free, as a compensation for the abolishment of the subsidies. But a new decree introduced separate subsidies for post-graduate courses again, although it does not increase the total amount of money in the envelope. Funding is not depending on the number of participants but on the number of diplomas (output-financing).

Entrance exams

The free access to higher education is limited for certain courses by an entrance exam. This has for long been the case for studies in Civil Engineering.

An entrance exam for the studies in Medicine and Dentistry was held for the first time in 1997, but not without some preceding difficulties. The exam consisted of two parts: a part for testing the student's ability in maths and sciences, and a part to test the student's capacity for processing knowledge. But the Arbitration Court (see paragraph 2.1.5.) objected to the first part because potential students hadn't been given enough time to prepare for the exam. That is why only the first part of the exam took place in 1997. Since 1998 both parts are tested. The possibility to retry is unlimited.

Also for the course Rehabilitation and Physiotherapy the Flemish government has imposed an entrance exam. This is the result of the threat of a federal law in 2003, possibly establishing a *numerus fixus* for this course.

Finally, in colleges there have been exams since long in the following fields: an artistic entrance exam for the courses in Audio-visual and Fine Arts, and Music and Drama, and an ability test for the course in Nautical Sciences.

Besides, it is important to know that the enrolment in higher education is also influenced by information campaigns in secondary education, for example campaigns to bring about that girls would choose a study with better prospects on the labour market; another example is the organisation of Science Weeks (*Wetenschapsweken*), to stimulate young people's interest in higher education.

The policy instruments used by the Flemish government to guarantee free access to higher education, are money and law. Although the entrance exams limit the free access partly, the freedom to enrol in higher education is very large. The choice of study can be made by the student himself / herself. This freedom of choice has led to patterns of choice comparable with other European countries (the following data are taken from Vanderhoeven, 1991; ICE, 1992; Verhoeven & Beuselinck, 1996).

Courses that provide good job opportunities, like Economics, Engineering, and Law, have high enrolment numbers, whereas courses with low job opportunities (courses that serve education and the administration) are less popular.

In the 1990s there seems to be a change in the relationship between choice of study, training, labour market, and professional occupation. More and more graduates get a job in labour sectors that are not related to their studies. This is especially true for graduates in humane and fundamental sciences, who traditionally found their way to

education and administration. Nowadays they often find work in the private sector. Around 40 % of recently graduated finds a job in business, that is a doubling in 25 years.

It is also important to know that a higher education diploma still is a guarantee for a well-paid job. Unemployment of highly educated is low, but a number of them has a job below their training level. It is clear that this diploma-inflation pushes away the bottom part of the labour market. That makes it understandable that more and more young people enter higher education: 54.3 % of all 18 year olds enrolls in one form or another of higher education (Auditcommissie, 1998).

1.2. New educational structures for working-learning relationships

The Flemish government finds lifelong learning or permanent training a prerequisite for the good functioning of a modern society. "The explosive growth of science (and the subsequent erosion of knowledge) and the rapid evolution towards a knowledge society require not only more elaborate possibilities to update knowledge by retraining, but will make it necessary in a while to think of the initial basic academic training as of the start of a process of lifelong learning. To meet the demands of the buyers adequately, the supply of permanent university training will have to be organised in a very flexible way" (Van Den Bossche, 1998: 6).

Although the Flemish government finds lifelong learning very important, it does not think it to be its responsibility to develop an educational structure in this field. Rather it wants to create the conditions in which the higher education institutions can organise such a structure. Nevertheless, the financing system finances some 6,400 students in higher education for social advancement (*hoger onderwijs voor sociale promotie*). Moreover, a decree is being prepared to create a new framework for permanent education, especially education for social advancement, but this remains to be aimed mainly at obtaining a secondary education diploma.

Flexibility of the exam system

The rather rigid exam system in Flanders offers possibilities for lifelong learning in the form of distance education and part time education.

Since 1994 it is possible for all courses at universities and colleges to take exams without attending courses. Special arrangements can be made for practicals and so on.

It is clear that this flexibility makes it easier for people who are working to improve their knowledge.

The same can be said of the possibility of part time education, i.e. enrol for half of the programme of a full time student.

Stimulation subsidies

As said before, the Flemish government does not feel directly responsible for the development of a lifelong learning structure. This implies that higher education institutions cannot rely on a permanent, structural funding. But minister of Education Van Den Bossche has promised a stimulation subsidy, that can "stimulate (universities) in the take-off of this important new component of university activities" (Van Den Bossche, 1998: 6).

Providing information

It seems that for lifelong learning too the Flemish government tries to influence higher education by providing information. Minister of Education Van Den Bossche has stressed the importance of lifelong learning on several occasions. Although the government does not feel directly responsible, it does indicate how a new structure for lifelong learning can be conceived. A good example of this 'management by speech' is the following remark of Van Den Bossche about financing lifelong learning (1998: 6): "As far as financing is concerned, there must be striven for an interuniversity mechanism of solidarity, so that towards less prosperous sectors a supply can be developed based on revenues from other programmes that are offered to strong sectors at market prices".

This does not mean that the Flemish government has not yet taken initiatives in the field of lifelong learning. The first initiatives were the introduction of the post-graduate courses. The Decree on universities of 1991 introduced two new forms of post-graduate education:

- complementary courses: an addition to or broadening of an academic course of the second cycle. After one year one can obtain the degree of '*Gediplomeerde in de aanvullende studies van ...*' (graduate in the complementary course).
- specialist courses: specialisation in a certain discipline. Two thirds of such a course consists of course units differing from the courses in the first or second cycle of

university education. A specialist course leads after one or two years to the degree of '*Gediplomeerde in de gespecialiseerde studies van ...*' (graduate in the specialist course).

Similar courses are established in colleges.

The demand from the labour market towards higher education for lifelong learning is met partially, for example by the development of high level retraining courses. Without being complete, we mention some more initiatives which are important for permanent education.

- tele- and distance learning: at KU Leuven this is supported since 1994 by the *Leuvens Instituut voor nieuwe Onderwijsvormen (LINOv)*, this is the Institute for New Teaching Methods. This academic institution aims at developing new teaching models for different target groups, with the aid of telematics and multimedia.
- Higher education for social advancement (*hoger onderwijs voor sociale promotie*), that takes place outside normal working hours. It concerns mostly one cycle courses, often structured in modules. This type of education provides people with professional experience with the opportunity to enhance their professional skills or to obtain a diploma in a field not related to their profession.
- The model project 'Learning and Working' (*Leren en Werken*) begins in September 1998. This project of the department of Education will offer (migrant) women who are long unemployed, or who want to work outdoors, a chance to obtain a diploma while working half time.
- Post-graduate courses are organised by universities as well as colleges. The government stopped financing them because there were too many developed, but recently decided to subsidise them again.

1.3. Involvement of external stakeholders in internal processes

The way in which socio-economic groups are involved in higher education, is established by decree. On the one hand it is prescribed that these groups must be represented in a certain way in the policy making process of higher education institutions. On the other hand, possibilities are created for co-operation between higher education and industry.

Representation of socio-economic groups

The Law of 24 March 1971 made the governance structure of universities more democratic. All sections of the university were given a representation, i.e. professors, assistants, administrative and technical personnel, and students. The social and economic organisations, and the communal and provincial authorities from then on were also part of the Board of Directors. On to the present day, the composition of the Boards of Directors is still according to these principles. In colleges there is also a democratic governance structure, that is a representation of personnel, students, governing bodies, and the socio-economic and cultural milieus.

Partnerships between higher education institutions and business

Co-operation between higher education institutions and business in the context of the service function of the higher education institutions can take three forms:

- agreements with governmental or private institutions about rendering services (contract research and so on);
- participation in a voluntary organisation or agreements with a voluntary organisation;
- participation in spin-off companies.

By decree these relations are organised in such a way, that the interests of the educational institutions are guarded, that their costs are remunerated, and that they get their rightful share of the profit.

On an educational level co-operation between universities and business can take the form of professorial chairs financed by banks or firms. Also doctorates of civil engineers are often carried out in co-operation with a company.

Colleges have to offer their students a period of practical training in a firm.

Vocational profiles

The VLOR (see paragraph 2.1.5.) co-ordinates the obligatory drafting of vocational profiles and course profiles. "The vocational profile describes what someone does in a certain profession and which skills, knowledge and attitudes are required to be able to practice that profession" (DVO, 1995: 7). On the basis of the vocational profiles, course profiles are drafted. "The course profile describes which skills, supporting knowledge and attitudes one should learn someone" (DVO, 1995: 7). The responsibility for establishing course profiles lies with the educational field itself and is guaranteed by the structural co-operation between the educational field and the socio-economic field (more concrete: between VLOR, SERV and DVO).

Chapter 2. Analysis of the policy content and process

2.1. Policy dimensions

2.1.1. Policy problems

With the restructuring of the Belgian state in 1989 Flanders received the authority over education. Therefore, in this paragraph we distinguish two periods: before 1989 and after 1989. For both periods we describe the problems in the field of higher education as perceived by the (Belgian or Flemish) government. We base this description on the scarce policy documents and the interviews (see paragraph 2.2.).

2.1.1.1. Problems in the period before 1989

As a result of the deep cleavages in Belgian society, it was difficult, if not impossible to develop a real higher educational policy. If the Belgian government had developed such a policy, the pacification, with difficulty reached, would probably have been in danger. The underlying ideological tendencies would have become manifest again and a crisis would have been hard to avoid. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the policy documents from this period contain very little explicit problem statements. An explicit problem statement could lead to a fundamental debate about the policy and that was something Belgian politics were not ready for. Nevertheless, some problems were mentioned in the policy documents and the interviews. These are: a strong centralisation of educational policy; pillarisation; financial problems; and an incomplete state reform.

Centralisation of educational policy

The minister of education, his personal staff(the cabinet) and the School Pact commission dominated the educational policy. As a result of the establishment of the School Pact commission (see paragraph 2.1.5.), the involvement and interest of the parliament was not very high. There were also several commissions and councils on the field of education, but their advice was not binding. Next to this, some pressure groups played an important role, because they could address the minister directly.

The School Pact Commission was established to make educational policy independent of political majorities. The commission tried to decide by consensus, and such a

decision was binding for the minister of Education.

This manner of political decision making led to a centralist policy making process towards some fields of higher education. Private institutions were relatively autonomous and hardly encountered any state interference. But this was not the case for state universities and state colleges. These institutions didn't have autonomy and were totally dependent of the minister of Education. This very rigid system caused the state higher education to be little responsive and little change-minded, and certainly not able to adapt to social changes and needs. For some it was clear that this was not an optimal situation, but the few changes that took place (e.g. as a result of the Saint-Anne Plan) enlarged the autonomy of the state institutions only a little bit. Real solutions were not possible in the political context of that time.

Impediments from the pillarisation

The division of the educational sector in several '*netten*' (educational networks) has deep historic roots and is related to the pillarisation of Belgian society. This pillarisation was reinforced by the principle of freedom of education that was confirmed in the School Pact. This principle holds that (potential) students have to be able to choose between different ideological, neutral and religious educational institutions.

Three main networks emerged: a free, i.e. private network; an official, i.e. state network; and a network of provincial and communal institutions), which were not related in any way. Policy adaptations, however much necessary, towards one of the networks, were only possible in the given context when in the other networks adaptations would take place too. The same was true for financing new forms of education or establishing new institutions. When one network received something, the other networks had to receive something too, and this both in Flanders and in Wallonia (see for example the expansion policy towards universities at the end of the 1960s). This system of distribution, known as '*wafelijzerpolitiek*' (the politics of the waffle iron), caused the educational expenses to increase dramatically. Moreover, it reinforced the rigidity of the educational system.

Financial problems

The economic recession in Belgium, as elsewhere, at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, made retrenchments in all policy sectors necessary and

inevitable. The then minister of Education Coens put it this way (1985: 10) : 'Doing educational politics in a time of economic growth must have been a pleasant occupation. (...) The choices to be made were only: how much 'more more' or 'less more' was assigned. Today the situation is different.' It is thus not exaggerated when we say that the Belgian higher educational policy and in a broader sense the whole government policy was dominated by financial problems. The increasing public debts and the increasing interest rates made a renewal of the content of the policy unlikely.

An uncompleted state reform

The problems mentioned above were noticed by some, but the political structure made it impossible to develop real solutions. The decentralisation of a part of the authority over education in 1980 towards the Communities did not go far enough to solve the problems. This decentralisation resulted in a complex division of authority and the Communities did not receive enough money to pursue an autonomous educational policy. The prime goal of the Flemish government was therefore to make a maximal use of the authority it had (study grants and study loans, adult education, permanent education, ...). For the rest, everything was being prepared to make possible the further decentralisation of the authority over education, what meant in particular the preparation of the establishment of the ARGO (see paragraph 2.1.5.). We have to take into account that 'higher education and scientific research at the end of 1988 were in a state of vigilance, really waiting on what would happen once the Communities could pursue an educational policy autonomously' (Adé, 1991-1992: 105-106).

2.1.1.2. Problems in the period from 1989 onwards

The improvement of the economic situation and the federalisation in 1989 made it possible that the content of the higher educational policy came under attention. The new policy makers responsible for education, that is the Flemish government and the minister of Education in particular, focussed their attention mainly on the quality of higher education. The analysis of several relevant policy documents (among other things inaugural statements, governmental agreements and policy letters) and the interviews gave us the following image of the policy problems with regard to the Flemish higher education in the period from 1989 onwards.

Immediately after the decentralisation of the educational authority, the Flemish government already stated that the educational system in Flanders would be extended qualitatively (Steunpunt Sociopolitiek Systeem, 1993: 242-243). “The educational supply must be able to meet dynamically the changing needs and the European initiatives.” Therefore a real autonomy in policy making for educational institutions must be made possible. Towards universities this has to lead to a rationalisation. To establish an optimal supply, the self-image of universities is an obstacle. Van Den Bossche (1995: 19) says: “The traditional idea according to which every institution tries to complete its supply of courses horizontally or vertically, is no longer relevant. The idea of a ‘full’ university therefore is outdated.” Quality management will become a constant factor in the Flemish educational policy. This is also shown when the first government of Van den Brande announces the reform of the non-university sector: “The content of the courses in higher education outside the universities has to be re-examined, among other things in the light of their relevance for the labour market. The high quality requirements posed on them in the future on the technical field and in the field of social skills and flexibility, here too will make a merger necessary.” (Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap, 1992: 3).

Not only the planning and the spread of the courses in colleges were perceived as problematic, but before 1994 also the number of colleges was seen as a problem. The large number of institutions and of courses at any rate made quality control difficult. But a change in the financing system has resulted in a merger of colleges and thus in a decrease in the number of colleges (from 163 to 29).

Higher education must not only be of high quality, but must also be affordable. The optimum use of financial means therefore is a constant preoccupation of the Flemish government. This is shown in the introduction of a new financing system (envelope-financing), that makes it possible to control the financial means, from a governmental point of view.

A problem that is mentioned often in this context, is the problem of low pass rates, because “both in social and in budgetary terms, these failures are an important waste” (Van Den Bossche, 1995: 20). Nevertheless, free access to higher education, like free choice, remains an important issue in the Flemish educational policy. It is therefore the responsibility of the institutions themselves (also at secondary education level) to optimise their efforts to increase the pass rate of their students. But the legislator took

a measure too: 5 % of the auxiliary academic staff has to be employed in study guidance for students in the first year.

From this remarks one can deduce that the quality of the educational supply and the low pass rates have a negative effect on the level of training of the Flemish working population, and that the supply of courses does not fit the needs of the labour market. This in turn has implications for the position of Flanders in the Europe of the 21st century.

The central problem according to the Flemish government therefore seems to be the level of training of the working population. Van Den Bossche (1998) mentions for example the erosion of knowledge and a rapidly changing knowledge which make suitable measures necessary. Hence the attention for lifelong learning. A problem that is stated implicitly in this context, is the structure of this lifelong learning. This is seen as one of the great challenges of the next decades (Van Den Bossche, 1995: 8). Here too the government seems in favour of giving as much autonomy to the institutions as possible, to provide them with the possibility to adapt their supply dynamically to the rising demand (ICE, 1996).

In a later document (Van Den Bossche, 1998) the Flemish government is more specific about the problems of the level of training and quality. It points out the problems regarding the transparency of the educational supply (see paragraph 1.1.). Among other things the relative value of courses and diplomas is not always clear. Next to this, the government points out the problem of inferior courses and the necessity to form centres of excellence, which also means that courses of a high quality have to become of an even higher quality. In fact the whole structure of the Flemish higher educational structure is put into question. The system has to become more effective and efficient and impediments from the past (related to the pillarisation) must be taken away. The assignment of the special government commissioner, rector of honour R. Dillemans, can be understood in this context. He has to develop a plan for the optimisation of university education. The plan must be finished within five years and in conference with the rectors, and Dillemans has to report about the progress he makes every year to the minister of Education.

We can conclude that the Flemish higher educational policy has become more clear

about the problems it perceives. The ideological and linguistic cleavages in Belgian society that made a thorough problem analysis difficult, if not impossible, do not seem to play a role any more. This is especially true for the linguistic problems, which have been abolished as far as education is concerned since the Communities became fully responsible for education. Sometimes the ideological opposition reappears, as for example in the discussion about the reform of the course in Rehabilitation and Physiotherapy. Apart from this, the Flemish government is concerned mainly with the quality of higher education, the level of training of the working population, the supply of courses, the link between education and labour market, the erosion of knowledge, the international position of higher education, and not for the least the efficiency and effectiveness of the higher education system.

2.1.2. Normative basis (policy ideology)

It seems that a normative basis for (higher) educational policy in Belgium and Flanders is only being developed since 1989. In the ten or fifteen years before that, no clear normative statements are made. Probably the remembrance that a government had to resign as a result of the case of Leuven caused some fear and a fundamental, political-normative debate was avoided out of fear to set off irreconcilable conflicts. Of course the absence of normative discussions before 1989 does not mean that the government did not have any normative ideas. But these weren't always stated explicitly. They can however be derived from some policy options and lines of action. A principle that was and is uncontested, is the democratic accessibility of higher education. The Omnivalence law of 1964 was the basis for this free access for everybody, regardless of the type of secondary education diploma obtained (with an exception for vocational secondary education). Another principle was the idea of freedom of choice of study, that was related to the principle of free access and to the freedom of education guaranteed by the Constitution. On to the present day this freedom of choice is a dominant principle. Next to this, ideological pluralism was an important issue for the government. In line with the structure of the pillarisation and the pacification democracy, two long lasting features of Belgian society, the main ideologies had to find a place in higher education. This expressed itself in the maintenance of state institutions, in which all ideologies could be represented.

From 1989 onwards, several policy documents show a more explicit and detailed expression of the governmental view on the role of higher education in a modern society. The same concepts appear time and time again, not only with regard to higher education but also with regard to the education system as a whole: quality, autonomy, and deregulation. By leaving the idea of detailed central regulation and opting on the contrary for a policy that is limited to creating the right conditions, thereby maximising the room for policy on a local institutional level, the Flemish government hopes to increase the quality of higher education. What the content of this ‘quality’ must be, is not stated clearly. But often the increasing international competition is pointed out, and the need for higher education institutions to be strong enough to take part in this competition.

In the first policy letter on education (Van Den Bossche, 1995) the role of education in general is formulated as follows. Education has to respond to developments in society, but has to be critical about these developments too. This means among other things that education will have to play an important role in the evolution towards a knowledge society. Next to this, education must contribute to the development of a modern civil society, by offering young people a broad general training and the instruments to orient themselves in a modern society. Education and also higher education are considered to be crucial for the development of a modern citizenship.

Regarding the role of higher education towards the economy, the Flemish government has confirmed several times the importance for higher education institutions to adapt to the demands of the economy, the labour market in particular. That is why the government has established rules by decree to promote co-operation between higher education institutions and industry. But in line with its fundamental choice for autonomy the government does not impose how institutions must adapt. Besides, the government warns the institutions that adaptations to the economy shouldn’t happen ad hoc, because the demands of the economy are not fixed. The specific role of higher education (offering education at a high level) therefore should not be pushed aside; the content of education cannot be aimed at the changing demands of students and employers. Minister of Education Van Den Bossche puts it this way: “There is a broad consensus in the scientific literature about the thesis that the industrial development has taken place for the most part independent from the structure of

existing educational provisions. (...) Nevertheless, ever since the 18th century supposed or real economic needs for skilled labour have been taken as a starting point for a systematic planning of educational provisions.” (Vlaamse Raad, Stuk 759 (1997-98) nr.1). In other words, it is not wrong for higher education institutions to establish new courses or change the content of existing programmes to meet changing demands, but they have to remember that they must continuously offer high quality education.

The expectations of the government with regard to the relation higher education - economy are present (quality has to be the main goal), but they are not stated explicitly. Only the decrees point out the direction in which the government wants to go. The expectation is, that implicit goals can best be achieved by creating a framework of rules that gives higher education institutions a large amount of freedom and possibilities to adapt, in their own way and according to their own insights, to economic and social demands. Minister of Education Van Den Bossche speaks of a “new policy philosophy: a philosophy rested on a totally new relationship between government and the educational field, whereby the government sets out the beacons of the policy, provides means for the realisations of this policy (envelope-financing) and grants the widest possible freedom to the educational field for this realisation.” (Vlaamse Raad, Stuk 546 (1993-94) nr. 1).

As far as the financial means are concerned, the Flemish government finds it necessary that the basic financing of higher education comes from the government and will continue to come from the government. The Flemish government strongly believes in the necessity to pay the normal functioning of higher education with money from the government, and in the incidental nature of private financing. At this moment, the major part of the financial resources of the higher education institutions comes from the government, although the third party funding of some institutions is growing. Also in the future higher education has to be able to fulfil its essential tasks independent from private funding.

As a counterpart, higher education institutions must take the responsibility for the funding they receive from the government. The Flemish government aims at ‘affordable quality’ and demands that institutions make an adequate use of the money they get from the government, because the government has to take its budgetary possibilities into account. Education never costs too much, but it must nevertheless be

payable. The system of an envelope (closed for colleges, half closed for universities) expresses the wish to make higher institutions accountable.

Granting autonomy to all higher education institutions is the most important instrument for the Flemish government to guarantee the quality of higher education in an international context. Autonomous institutions can adapt dynamically to changing demand and European initiatives. But the government thought that the colleges were too small to cope with this autonomy and therefore triggered off an amalgamation. Only large colleges would be able to cope with the high quality demands regarding technological knowledge, social skills and flexibility that are expected from college graduates. For "quality education is more than a transfer of knowledge. It also implies preparing young people for tomorrow's society, including the labour market" (Van Den Bossche, 1995: 7).

According to the Flemish government these reforms have resulted in a modern, dynamic, and professional management. In turn this should be a guarantee for the quality of education. To verify this, a quality assurance system was established, based on self-evaluation and external evaluation. The system is comparable for universities and colleges. Governmental control is limited to control in retrospect (control of the product).

The quality of education is also guaranteed by the legal prohibition of expansion. Each university was assigned certain courses in certain study areas. For the colleges 11 study areas and the basic courses in each study area were fixed by decree.

Up till now, we talked of higher education as a whole most of the time, but the law of 7 July 1970 already speaks of a unity in three modalities. Each form of higher education (university education on one side, college education of one cycle and college education of two cycles on the other side) has its own task and identity. The decrees of 1991 and 1994 confirm this.

Art. 4 of the Decree of 24 July 1991: "Universities should, in the interest of society, be simultaneously active in the field of academic education, scientific research and scientific service provision."

Art. 3 of the Decree of 13 July 1994: "Colleges should, in the interest of society, be

simultaneously active in the field of college education, social service provision and, where appropriate, project-based scientific research in collaboration with a university or other body in this country or abroad. The development and practice of the arts will also be the task of the colleges, which will organise courses in the fields of audio-visual and plastic art, music and drama. The provision of college education will be the primary task of the college."

The way in which the role of each of these types of higher education is conceived, at the same time stresses the unity and the diversity. The unity can be seen in that college education is conceived of as 'of an academic level', transitions of colleges to universities are possible, and the regulation concerning colleges is derived from the regulation concerning universities. The last holds that for the restructuring of the college sector "the same philosophy with analogous starting-points" was used that was the basis for the Decree on universities. In consideration of the specific role colleges have to play, they were given a similar autonomy and responsibility, and were structured similar to universities (i.e. with a board of directors, an academic council, departments, and so on). On a large number of formal fields (for example entrance requirements, the possibility of distance education and part time education, the quality control system) the legal regulations hardly make a difference between colleges and universities. Therefore, and because of the 'vocational drift' of universities and the 'academic drift' of colleges, their relation becomes competitive as far as recruiting students and attracting private funding is concerned.

Another element of unity is the wish to lessen the impact of ideological differences between institutions on policy making. That is why the state institutions were given an independent statute and why the same regulations as for free institutions now apply on them. The structure of the state institutions is still fixed by decree, in contrast with the free institutions, for which only the representation of students and staff is regulated by decree.

The diversity of the different types of higher education shows mainly in the different roles attached to them. Universities provide academic education and do research. Colleges offer education of an academic level, but have to strive after a closer tie with working life. If colleges do research, it must be limited to project research.

From the above an image appears of changing normative concepts concerning higher

education in Flanders. This is however not true for the accessibility of higher education, because this is still large and uncontested as a principle, notwithstanding a number of entrance exams and a possible *numerus fixus* (see paragraph 1.1.).

In a way, the higher educational system before 1989 is based on values that are more or less part of the Christian-Democratic, the (classical) Liberal and the Social-Democratic ideological points of view (Wielemans, 1996-1997).

The idea that educational objectives have to be formulated by non-state organisations is for example part of the Christian-democratic tradition. “The expectation is then that educational goals are an expression of, and have to be linked to, values of the family or of certain religious-ideological identifiable groups” (id.: 348). This idea is linked with the Catholic principle of subsidiarity.

Liberal starting-points or classical Liberal values that could be seen in Flemish higher education, are “free expression of education, science and culture en thus also pluralism with regard to religion, institutions and the building of society. Social subsystems, like culture, politics and economy, in this vision had their own (self-organising) function” (id.: 349).

An important value of the Social-Democratic point of view is servitude of education to society. That is why a large autonomy is seen as threatening the common values of a society that can only exist on the basis of a common body of knowledge. Education is “considered to contribute to equality of social, cultural, economical and political opportunities regardless of the differences in social, religious-ideological, sexual and racial background of the students” (id.: 348). This Social-Democratic idea of equality shows clearly in the accessibility of Flemish higher education and the system of study grants (see paragraph 1.1.).

The values described above do not exclusively belong to a certain ideological point of view, but the point is that the Flemish higher education system could be seen as an amalgam of different normative values.

The educational policy in the European countries is characterised by the rise of the so-called ‘economism’ (compare Brown e.a., 1996). “This new concept indicates that the principles of the free market have become directive in political decision making, also concerning education. ‘Economism’ has a neutral make-up and does not like to be seen in the company of the historically known ideologies. After a closer look it has all the features of an ideology ...” (Wielemans, 1996-1997: 347).

The ‘economistic’ view on education shows itself in the autonomy and responsibility

of all educational institutions. Flexibility and institutionalised competition supplemented with quality control should lead to an educational supply that meets the needs of the educational and labour market. To meet this, the notion of accountability is also central. Education has to account to “the tax payer or the sponsor in terms of efficiency and effectiveness ...” (Wielemans, 1996-1997: 350). The idea therefore is also that higher education has to provide more (directly) applicable knowledge. This can be promoted by selecting centres of excellence in scientific research.

Following Husen, Tuijnman & Halls (1992), Wielemans concludes that the traditional political parties and ideologies can easily come to a consensus about the necessity of the (neo-liberal) educational accountability. The conservatives and the Christian-Democrats, as well as the leftist parties approve of the essential features of this new way of policy making.

When we look at the Flemish situation, it becomes clear that ‘economism’ advances in Flanders too. The policy letters of minister of Education Van Den Bossche and also other policy documents contain a large number of characteristics of this semi-neutral management ideology. This does not mean that the old values of democratisation and accessibility do not longer play a role. These normative values are important, but seem to be in second place. Van Den Bossche (1998) even says that the ideological pluralism is secondary. There seems to be a clear shift in the normative conceptions of the Flemish government regarding higher education, namely from an amalgam of Christian-Democrat, classical Liberal and Social-Democrat values, to a more homogenous neo-liberal and ‘economistic’ value system.

2.1.3. Policy instruments

In chapter 1 some clear policy lines of the Flemish government to meet the needs of the economy and society emerge. We already described the policy instruments in that chapter. Here we provide a summary of the policy goals and the instruments used to achieve them.

- Firstly, the Flemish government tries to enhance the quality of higher education by increasing the transparency and rationality of the course supply, and by refining the system of quality control. The policy instruments used for this, are law, money, but

especially information. As stated above, the government uses the method of 'management by speech'. In a certain sense the steering model of the Flemish government could be described as the 'talking state'.

- Secondly, the Flemish government strives to increase the level of training of the working population, as becomes clear out of the free access policy and the system of study grants. Policy instruments here are law and money.
- Thirdly, the Flemish government encourages new educational methods in behalf of the knowledge society. It creates a framework of laws, provides stimulating subsidies, but again mainly manages 'by speech'.
- Fourthly, the involvement of external stakeholders in internal processes of higher education institutions is guaranteed by law.

Next to these policy lines, the Flemish government also promotes the internationalisation of higher education. Among other things, it stimulates participation in European programmes, supports international co-operation financially, introduces adaptations to international systems, and subsidises foreign students.

2.1.4. Policy linkage

In Belgium / Flanders, we cannot find many linkages between educational policy and other policy fields. Two clear examples are the following.

- Companies are granted fiscal advantages for their expenses with regard to the education and training of their employees.
- Measures concerning the transition from secondary to higher education, e.g. foreknowledge tests, course selection counselling by psycho-medico-social centres.

2.1.5. Policy networks / main actors / policy processes

Belgium has a longstanding tradition of consultation and broad participation in policy making. The federalisation has not changed this. But the situation has changed since the educational authority was given to Flanders. The Flemish government does still consult quite a lot, but it has created new institutions and has given a new role to existing ones.

In the following paragraphs, we first describe the policy network before the state reform of 1988, second we take a closer look at the policy network in the Flemish Community from 1989 onwards.

2.1.5.1. 1970s and 1980s

From the mid of the 1970s up to the 1980s, the political agenda was dominated by propositions for the reform of the Belgian state and by retrenchment propositions that were a result of the bad economic situation (see Introduction). Therefore the issue of higher education could not attract much attention. The higher education policy was limited to continuing the known steering mechanisms (see paragraph 3.2.). In the subsequent sections, we first describe the features of the agencies and bodies that played a role in higher educational policy. Then we will analyse the actual interaction in the policy network. (For a scheme, see Annex 1.)

2.1.5.1.1. The actors in higher education

Successively we take a look at advisory bodies (School Pact Commission, High Councils and Permanent Council, National Council for State Education, Flemish Interuniversity Council), pressure groups (National Secretariat of Catholic Education, trade unions), and the government (parliament, government, Cultural Council / Flemish Council).

School Pact Commission (Schoolpactcommissie)

The three traditional political parties (Christian-Democrats, Social-Democrats, and Liberals) had pacified the ideological domain with the School Pact (see introduction). They decided to apply the principles of the consensus democracy to the follow-up of the pact too. Therefore a Permanent Commission was established. This commission consisted of the chairmen of the political parties involved and three members of each

of these parties. Although the members of the commission were MPs, the Permanent Commission was not a parliamentary commission. In the parliament decisions are taken majority against minority, and that is exactly what one wished to avoid. The authority of the Commission stretched out over all forms of education, including college education but excluding university education.

In the beginning of the 1970s the School Pact was revised. The so-called language parties (Volksunie, Front Démocratique des Francophones, Rassemblement Wallon), who stressed the issue of the linguistic problems, signed the revised School Pact too. The three original signer kept a right of veto. The National School Pact commission had the authority to change the pact and prepare, if necessary, a new pact. Advises that were decided by consensus, were binding for the minister of Education.

High Councils and Permanent Council (*Hoge Raden* and *Vaste Raad*)

For the non-university higher education sector the High Councils and the Permanent Council were established. They were based on the law of 7 July 1970, that restructured the whole higher education sector. From that time on, one spoke of three forms of higher education: university education, higher education of the long type, and higher education of the short type. The non-university higher education was divided in another way. The old difference between higher technical education, higher pedagogical education and art education was replaced with a structure in eight domains: technical, agrarian, economic, social, pedagogical, paramedical, artistic, and maritime higher education. The law envisaged the establishment of a High Council (*Hoge Raad*) for each of the eight types of higher education, to advise the minister of Education on his request or on their own initiative. A Permanent Council (*Vaste Raad*) would co-ordinate and advise on problems that concerned more than one domain. The composition and functioning of all these councils were only legally established in 1977 (KB 18 December 1977, changed by KB 13 August 1985). Every High Council consisted of twenty members: six representatives of the governing bodies, six representatives of the management and teaching staff, two students, three representatives of the trade unions, and three representatives of the economic and social organisations. The Permanent Council consisted of 24 members: eight representatives of the Permanent Commission for academic degrees and university exams, and the chairman and deputy-chairman of each High Council.

National Council for State Education (*Nationale Raad voor het Rijksonderwijs*)

The National Council for State Education gave advice on all propositions to change the educational structure, the duration of studies, and the general orientation of education. Among the 21 members were representatives of the state university education, the state inspection and the state schools, the parents and teachers, and the trade unions.

Flemish Interuniversity Council

The Flemish Interuniversity Council (*Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad*) or VLIR was established in 1976 to promote the co-operation between the universities and to be an advisory body towards the ministers of Education and Science Policy. In contrast with the School Pact commission, the High Councils and the Permanent Council, the VLIR still exists (see below).

National Secretariat of Catholic Education

Since 1957 the National Secretariat of Catholic Education (*Nationaal Secretariaat van het Katholiek Onderwijs*) or NSKO represents the governing bodies of catholic education institutions. The National Union of Catholic Higher Education (*Nationaal Verbond van het Katholiek Hoger Onderwijs* or NVKHO) is part of it and co-ordinates the policy concerning problems in the field of higher education.

The NSKO is in fact the executive body of the General Council of Catholic Education (*Algemene Raad van het Katholiek Onderwijs* or ARKO), which consists of parents, teachers, governing bodies, and bishops. The ARKO is a forum for consultations between the parties concerned, and decides on the main policy options within catholic education.

Trade unions

In Belgium three trade unions play a role in the consultation and negotiation structures of the Belgian government: the Christian trade union ACV (*Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond*), the Socialist trade union ABVV (*Algemeen Belgisch Vakverbond*), and the Liberal trade union ACLVB (*Algemene Centrale der Liberale Vakbonden van België*). Towards education the relevant federations are respectively the CCPTO (*Christelijke Centrale van het Personeel bij het Technisch Onderwijs*), CVMNO (*Christelijke Centrale van het Personeel bij het Vrij Middelbaar en*

Normaal Onderwijs), and the CURO (*Christelijke Unie van Personeelsleden bij het Rijksonderwijs*) on the Christian side; the ACOD (*Algemene Centrale der Openbare Diensten*) on the Socialist side; and the VSOA (*Vrij Syndicaat van het Openbaar Ambt*) on the Liberal side.

Parliament and government

All advisory bodies and pressure groups mentioned above operated around the traditional policy actors: the parliament (the legislative authority) and the government (the executive authority). Both had the right to initiative (the right to put forward a bill), but it was the government who used this right most. In the 1980s the governments used unlimited powers, a procedure in which parliament allows the government to take important decisions without going through the parliamentary procedures.

The administration only had an executive function. The preparation of the policy was done by the cabinet (the personal staff) of each minister.

Cultural Council / Flemish Council

In 1970 the educational authority was partly transferred from the national level to the level of the Communities. However, the Cultural Council (*Cultuurraad*) did not receive the so-called School Pact-authorities. The successor of the Cultural Council, the Flemish Council (*Vlaamse Raad*), had more or less the same authority, therefore it faced the same problems that were caused by the uncompleted transfer of authority (see introduction). The budget that was available for education on the Flemish level was limited and consisted for 90 % of money for study grants.

2.1.5.1.2. The policy network concerning higher education

The consultation model has strong roots in Belgian society. That is shown among other things in the habit of concluding pacts. For example, the Pact for Social Solidarity (*Pact van Sociale Solidariteit*), concluded in 1944 between employers organisations and trade unions, was the basis for the social security system. In the ideological field the School Pact and later on the Cultural Pact were established (see Introduction). The so-called Pact of the Belgians regulated the cohabitation of Flemish and Walloon people, by establishing a complex structure of Communities and Regions.

These pacts were always transformed into laws to guarantee the follow-up. In that way each party concerned could be sure that the concessions made to her would be actually realised. These laws were the result of consultation and negotiation, and not so much the result of a process started by the policy makers. In other words, the real policy making moment was situated before the legal procedure.

This way of policy making can be seen clearly in the functioning of the School Pact Commission. Important matters concerning education (except university education) were not discussed first in the parliament, but in the School Pact Commission. An advise of that commission that was based on a consensus between its members was de facto binding for the minister of Education. It is obvious that the role of the parliament was limited by this. As a result, many MPs lost interest in educational policy, and this on its turn confirmed the small role of parliament and even made it smaller.

The loss of power of the parliament had still other causes than the existence of the School Pact Commission. Three other factors are also at the heart of this evolution.

Firstly, there was a tendency to deal with difficult dossiers outside the parliament, because in that way one could avoid to work with majorities and minorities, in other words a consensus could be sought for. This tendency is said to be based in the introduction of the single universal suffrage, that would give too much power too the numerical majority (workers, Dutch speaking people, ...). Secondly, the unclear division of authority between the parliament and the Cultural Council / Flemish Council weakened the position of both (see below). Lastly, but not least, the parliament was losing power because the governments of W. Martens governed with unlimited powers. The right of veto of the opposition, that was a characteristic of the consensus democracy, was no longer acknowledged. Therefore, from the government Martens V onwards, the School Pact Commission could no longer function as well.

The comment of the observers towards parliament were not tender: "The parliament takes note of already taken decisions and provides the money to execute them" (L. Huyse); "The parliament has become a floating hippopotamus. Even when one watches this animal closely, one cannot tell if it is alive, or already dead" (M. Storme).

The legislative authority of Flanders, that is the Cultural Council and later the Flemish

Council, was also limited in its actions in the field of education. On the one hand this was caused by the lack of sufficient authority assigned to this council and the unclear division of authority with the national level. On the other hand the lack of financial resources was a restriction as well.

The problem of the division of authority is illustrated very clearly by F. Baert, who said that "the Cultural Councils are competent in the field of education for education, except for education". The Cultural Councils did have the rest authority, but as long as the School Pact-competencies remained national, *de facto* this meant little. A further decentralisation of education was at that time impossible because of the resistance of the Liberal and Social-Democratic parties, who feared that the state education would be discriminated. A maximal interpretation of the authority of the Cultural Council and later the Flemish Council, that was demanded by the Christian-Democrats and the Flemish Nationalists, was also rejected by the other parties. The State Council also interpreted this authority in a minimal way.

On top of the lack of clear authority, there was a lack of financial resources. The money available on the Flemish level for education was limited and had to be used almost entirely for financing study grants.

All this explains why the Cultural Council only approved five decrees on education. They all concerned university education. For example, the VLIR was given a legal basis (1976) and the co-operation between the Antwerp universities was given a new impulse (1978). The Flemish Council, who hardly had broader competencies, also couldn't pursue an educational policy. Only two decrees were approved, both on university education, notably the content of exams and the structure of state institutions, in the period from 1980 to 1988.

The executive authority, the government, could extend its power as a consequence of the developments described above. The tendency to make policy outside the parliament was fortified by governance with unlimited powers. The authority of the Cultural Council / Flemish Council was too little and too less coherent to play a significant role in the educational policy. Advisory bodies could only give non-binding advises, and even the School Pact Commission was hindered in its functioning.

The government clearly was the most important actor in the political decision making process. But the power of the government, or rather of each minister, must be

nuanced. The financial efforts that were imposed to the whole government by the national budget to combat the waffle iron politics and the (symptoms of) the economic crisis, limited the room to manoeuvre of each individual minister. The minister of Education, if he liked it or not, also had to bow for the requirements of a strict budgetary politic, even if he was the central actor in educational policy.

2.1.5.2. Since 1989

The structure of the policy network as it existed until 1989, could not be maintained in the period after the state reform, because the right of legal initiative in the field of education was now with the Flemish Council and the Flemish government. There also was no intention to keep this network. For a long time, in Flanders the idea had taken form to abolish the function of the minister of Education as the organising body for state education and to establish an autonomous body to take over that function. The establishment of the Autonomous Council for Community Education was the result. Other changes were the replacement of some advisory bodies (except the VLIR) by the Flemish Educational Council, a meeting place for all who are concerned with education. In 1998 the Flemish Colleges Council (VLHORA) was established too. The judicial control on the educational policy was extended. The administration was given a broader task. The consultation with socio-economic groups was maintained.

As in the previous sections, we first describe the formal authority of each actor in the policy network. Then we focus our attention on the actual functioning of the network. (For a scheme, see annex 2.)

2.1.5.2.1. Actors in the policy network

We successively look at the government (Flemish parliament, Flemish government, the administration, the provinces), the advisory bodies (VLOR, SERV, VLIR, VLHORA), the pressure groups (VSKO, trade unions, VEV), the ARGO and the courts (State Court and Arbitration Court).

Flemish parliament

The Flemish Council, who was responsible both for community matters and regional matters, at first took over the limited educational authority of the Cultural Council, but from 1989 onwards could develop an educational policy. The Flemish Council

was renamed in 1996 (after the first direct elections for the Flemish Council) to Flemish Parliament (*Vlaams Parlement*), to indicate the validity of this legislative authority. The Flemish parliament consists of 124 directly elected members. It has a legislative function, develops policy together with the government, appoints and controls the government.

The Flemish parliament, together with the Flemish government, is the legislative authority. When the legislative initiative is taken by a minister, this governmental bill is submitted to the State Council for advice, after which it is forwarded to the parliament. The parliament relegates the governmental bill to the competent commission. After the discussion in the commission, the parliament decides in plenary meeting. When an MP initiates the legislative process, the parliamentary bill must be taken into consideration by the chairman of the Flemish parliament. For the rest it goes through the same process as a governmental bill (i.e. discussion in the commission and decision in plenary meeting). The obligation to consult and ask advice, among others the advice of the State Council, is then not required. That is why improper parliamentary bills also exist, meaning that a minister asks an MP to submit a draft bill to escape the prescribed consultations and advices. When the bill is approved, it is sent to the government to be assented, proclaimed, and published. Before the final vote a second reading can be asked for, or the bill can be sent to the commission again.

Flemish government

The Flemish government (*Vlaamse Regering*) is elected by the Flemish parliament. It makes the policy (and therefore can propose legislation) and is the executor of the legislation. The government is helped by its administration, and each minister has a cabinet of personal staff.

Administration of higher education and scientific research

The Administration of higher education and scientific research or AHOWO is part of the department of Education of the Ministry of the Flemish Community. It has both a policy preparatory and a policy executive function. It consists of two departments: the department 'universities and scientific research' and the department 'colleges'.

Provinces

Some provinces are the organising body of a college. Three provincial colleges exist: the provincial College of Antwerp, the provincial college of Limburg, and the Mercator College of the Province Oost-Vlaanderen.

Flemish Educational Council

To replace the existing councils, advisory bodies and commissions, the Decree on Education II of 31 July 1990 stipulated the establishment of the Flemish Educational Council (*Vlaamse Onderwijsraad* or *VLOR*). The VLOR started working on 17 April 1991.

The authority of the VLOR includes all educational matters belonging to the authority of the Flemish Community (except the budget). The General Council of the VLOR is competent in matters concerning more than one educational level. For each educational level a different Council is established too. One of them is the Council for Higher Education (*Raad Hoger Onderwijs*), which replaces among other things the former High Councils and the Permanent Council. At first the Council for Higher Education consisted of three departments: one for university education, one for college education of the long type, and one for college education of the short type. The integration of both types of college education made the existence of two separate departments obsolete, so they were abolished, but it is still possible that within the council separate meetings are held depending on whether issues concerning universities or issues concerning colleges are discussed.

In the Council for Higher Education and in the General Council the social and economic organisations (i.e. trade unions and employers organisations) are represented by four members, appointed on proposal of the Social and Economic Council of Flanders (*Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen*). Next to them, there are twelve representatives of the governing bodies, eight of the educational trade unions, and four of parents organisations. The administration and the universities additionally appoint experts.

This composition reflects one of the functions of the VLOR, namely being a forum for consultation and debate concerning all matters that affect education. For that reason, the VLOR organises consultations about vocational profiles, course profiles, basic skills, and common minimal programmes at colleges. The VLOR can also do research.

But the VLOR is in the first place an advisory body towards the minister of

Education, on initiative of the council itself or because decrees say so. The minister of Education is obliged to ask the advice of the VLOR in many cases.

Social and Economic Council of Flanders (*Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen* or *SERV*)

The SERV was established in 1985 as the successor of the Regional Economic Council for Flanders. It consists of 10 representatives of employers, middle classes and farmers on the one hand, and 10 representatives of trade unions on the other hand. At the moment the members of the SERV are: six representatives of the VEV (see below), two of the retail association, two of the farmers union, six of the ACV, three of the ABVV and one of the ACLVB.

The SERV is a consultative body for the social partners, and also organises the consultation with the Flemish government.

The SERV can advise to the Flemish government on social and economic matters, on its own initiative or when asked by the Flemish parliament or (a member of) the Flemish government. Bills concerning education must be submitted simultaneously to VLOR and SERV. Since 1995 the SERV gives a strict interpretation to the notion 'social and economic matters', meaning that it does not longer formulate remarks unless the decree has a clear social and economic impact.

Flemish Interuniversity Council

The Flemish Interuniversity Council (*Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad* or *VLIR*) promotes consultation and co-operation between the universities. It is also an advisory body towards the minister of Education in university matters.

The VLIR is composed of the rectors of all Flemish universities and a supplementary member of the big universities. In other words, not all sections of the universities are represented.

In a number of matters, the Decree on universities of 12 June 1991 has made the advice of the VLIR compulsory.

Flemish Colleges Council

The directors of the colleges had united at first in two associations, one for colleges of the short type, and one for colleges of the long type. In that way they tried to promote mutual co-operation. As a consequence of the integration of both types in new, big

colleges (Decree of 1994), both associations were integrated as well and became the Flemish Colleges Council (*Vlaamse Hogescholen Raad*). This council has been given the same statute as the VLIR. The VLIR also is the model for the way in which VLHORA should work and function in the future.

The VLHORA (Decree of 7 July 1998) consists of the general directors of all colleges. As in VLIR, not all sections of the colleges are represented. The VLHORA is a forum for consultation between colleges, defends the interests of the colleges, and advises to the AHOWO and the minister of Education.

Flemish Secretariat of Catholic Education

As a consequence of the communities becoming responsible for education, the NSKO (see above) was divided per language community. Now there is the *Vlaams Secretariaat van het Katholiek Onderwijs* or VSKO. In a similar way the NVKHO is now the VVKHO.

Trade unions

The three Christian federations (CCPTO, CVMNO, and CURO) were merged in 1993 to the Christian Education Federation (*Christelijke Onderwijs Centrale*). The federations on the Socialist and Liberal side (ACOD and VSOA respectively) are still the same.

Flemish Employers Union

The Flemish Employers Union (*Vlaams Economisch Verbond* or VEV) represents the Flemish employers. It appoint representatives for the SERV and hence indirectly for the VLOR.

Autonomous Council of Community Education

The discontent with the fact that the minister of Education also was the organising body of state education, resulted in the 1980s in a Flemish demand for an autonomous organising body. When a political agreement was reached between the four parties who then formed the Flemish government (CVP, SP, PVV, VU), the ARGO (*Autonome Raad van het Gemeenschapsonderwijs*) was established by a special decree. The Central Council (*Centrale Raad*) of the ARGO became the organising body for community education in all educational levels, except university education,

written education, higher marine education and the Royal Military School.

It was settled that colleges could be made autonomous (Flemish Autonomous Colleges). This process was completed on 31 August 1995. In 1991 decentralised Local Councils were established, but these were replaced by the Decree on colleges by College Committees and Department Committees.

State Council (*Raad van State*)

Next to the advisory bodies, courts play this role in the policy making process as well. The State Council consist of two departments. The Department Administration is an administrative court. The Department Legislation is responsible for advise on judicial and textual difficulties of laws, decrees and other regulations, except the budget, which is controlled by the State Audit Office. Governments must ask the advise. But they can claim urgency; in that case the advise is limited (in case of a governmental bill) or even not necessary (in other cases).

When a violation of the division of authority is found, the text is given to the reconciliation committee. In this committee the governments meet, with an equal number of Dutch speaking and French speaking ministers. Decisions are taken by consensus. The advise of this committee is de facto binding.

Arbitration Court (*Arbitragehof*)

The Arbitration Court was established in 1983 (law of 28 June 1983) as a referee in conflicts of authority between the legislators. The national parliament and the councils of the Communities and the Regions can issue norms with the same legal force, but with a different field of application. In 1989 the Arbitration Court was made competent to check legal initiatives on their conformity with the constitutional principles of equality of the Belgians (art. 10), injunction of discrimination (art. 11), and freedom of and the right to education (art. 24).

The Arbitration Court in other words is a constitutional court. It has six Dutch language judges and six French language judges; half of them are former MPs and the other half are jurists. The Arbitration Court answers pre-judicial questions of lower courts and judge appeals for nullification, that can be submitted by any person who has an interest, and by the governments pointed out by the law.

2.1.5.2.2. *The interaction between the actors in the policy network*

A 'new' government was made responsible in 1989 for educational policy: the Flemish parliament and the Flemish government. That cleared the way for another style of policy making. There was no longer room for an underlying ideological battle of principles. "Such forms of 'organised distrust' and 'structured opposition' are in fact at right angle to a proper management." (Van Den Bossche, 1996-1997). The search for a compromise at the national level was now definitively no longer necessary. "You only conclude a pact when it is war and there is no war." (Van Den Bossche, 1996-1997).

The method of consultation and negotiation was however retained. A lot of policy documents stress the desirability of 'participation'. The VLOR was established to give all parties concerned with education a formal voice in the policy process. The establishment of this new body and also giving a new role to existing ones, changed the nature and structure of the policy network.

Central in the policy network is the minister of Education. He takes the most initiatives for new legislation, he asks and receives the obligatory advises of the VLOR, the SERV and the State Council, and the pressure groups address him. But probably more important are the informal contacts he has with several (heads of) educational agencies.

The legal initiative is in the hands both of the parliament and the government. But as on the national level (although less), legal initiatives at the Flemish level are initiated for the most part by the government (in the period 1989-1995 only seven on a total of 34 educational decrees stemmed from a parliamentary initiative). For a part this can be explained from the fact that the government has the administration and the cabinets at its disposal, whereas MPs are more limited in their possibilities and are less assisted by experts. The importance of the preparation of the policy should therefore not be underestimated. There is a rather large openness between the administration, the cabinet (the personal staff) of the minister of Education, and even the 'cell education' of the coalition-partner. As a result, propositions can be drafted coherently with knowledge.

A draft bill requires the advice of three bodies. Firstly, the State Council, department legislation, advises on the judicial suitability of the draft bill. The State Council often reproaches the government for asking advice in a too short notice. In that way the decree on colleges, consisting of 369 articles, had to be examined within

three days. The State Council regrets this way of working, and points out that the quality of the advices is in danger.

After the advice of the State Council, the draft bill is forwarded simultaneously to the VLOR and the SERV. In that way all sections concerned with education can point out their ideas about the draft bill. The sections represented in the SERV are the trade unions and the employers. In the VLOR these are, apart from these two groups, representatives of governing bodies, educational trade unions, and parents organisations. The composition of both the VLOR and the SERV, meant to improve consultation and participation, does not always serve the strength of the advices. Observers tell that it is not always possible to reach an agreement between the opposite interests united in these advisory bodies. This causes the advices to become general and vague, or next to the advice a minority viewpoint is formulated. The last was the case with the advice on the decree on colleges. The governing bodies of the universities and the representatives of staff and students of the universities formulated a different view on some issues. The weakness of some advices can also be explained by the fact that (some) members are not so familiar with the field of education. Finally, the time frame also plays a role: the time between the submission of the bill and the moment that the advice has to be delivered, often is short, too short to examine the bill thoroughly.

As advisory body in university matters the VLIR is, however, more important (when the decree on universities was prepared, the VLOR did not yet exist). The intention is, that the VLHORA will play a similar role towards colleges. This raises the problem of the division of authority between the advisory bodies. VLIR and VLOR on the one hand, and VLHORA and VLOR on the other hand, operate in the same field whenever the universities or the colleges respectively are discussed. The relations between these councils is not always optimal. The VLOR is de facto pushed into the background by the VLIR. But VLOR remains the only council that represents the whole educational field and that can discuss matters concerning different levels of education.

Even regardless of the problems encountered by the advisory bodies mentioned thus far, the real impact of the advices can be put into question. After all, the obligatory round of advice is preceded by informal contacts between the minister of Education and the (heads of) educational agencies. Depending on the matter under consideration, those agencies are the trade unions, the representatives of the networks,

the governing bodies, the rectors, ... in short everybody who will feel the impact of the new legislation. Each agency talks separately with the minister, to explain its views and wishes. On the one hand they ask themselves to be treated that way, because they find that the differences in their formal position justify a separate treatment. On the other hand this method creates room to manoeuvre for the minister, to make strategic choices of his own, if he thinks this is necessary. On the basis of these talks, the minister of Education can find out how far the partners are willing to go, that is how much of the preparatory work done by the administration or the cabinet will be accepted in the field.

The actual moment of decision, the moment and the place where a certain choice is made, cannot be indicated clearly. Is it the minister of Education who has a strategic plan and therefore proposes an option, gives and takes, but ultimately realises his ideas? Or can the partners, or one partner, put such pressure that their proposals are accepted? Or define the propositions of the administration or the cabinet the final result? It is likely that each decision process is a combination of these three elements, and that it is unclear even for the participants who launched a certain idea first. The compromise nature of the decisions probably makes this even more true.

But what becomes clear out of the interviews, is that the most important decisions are taken by an inner circle, a small group of people, with among them the minister, that mutually agree within that limited circle on the policy options. They are, in spite of their opposite interests, not antagonistic. They know each others point of view; the readiness to look for an agreement is present. 'En petit comité' they arrive at the necessary conclusions.

It indeed seems to be the case that the decision often is already taken in this phase of the process. Advices, amendments and so on can change little about that. Maybe this is not a surprise: the people who advise are partly the same as the ones the minister talked to informally; the political parties in the parliament are related to some of these actors.

Irrespective of the imperative character of the choices that are already made, after the round of advice, the bill has to be submitted to the Flemish parliament. When we look at it in a formal way, the parliament is the most important actor in the development of educational policy. That is the consequence of a stipulation in the Constitution that

says that all essential regulations concerning education have to be regulated by decree. The State Council has interpreted this stipulation in a strict way, meaning that the parliament has to discuss all regulation concerning education. That is why all legislation is put together in large decrees, concerning all educational levels (e.g. the so-called 'mammoth decree'), or concerning a certain educational sector (e.g. the decree on universities and the decree on colleges). The parliament has criticised this way of working, but it can be understood, given the interpretation of the State Council. But the result is that many MPs pull out, especially when the government asks for an urgent treatment of the bills.

On the other hand, however, the importance of participation and consultation must not be underestimated. Several actors can influence the process on several occasions (in talks with the minister, in the VLOR or the SERV, in hearings with the commission for education of the parliament, ...). The opposition sometimes is involved explicitly in the consultations. The political agreement on the ARGO for example, that contained the important option to replace the minister of Education as organising body for state education by an independent council, was an agreement between the majority and the opposition. The reform of the colleges sector required a change of the special decree on the ARGO and therefore would neither have been possible without the co-operation of the opposition parties (changing a special decree requires a majority of two-thirds in the Flemish parliament).

Summarised, we can say that in comparison with the period before 1989 the minister of Education still is the centre of educational policy making, but that he has more opportunities to really develop a policy. Additionally, this policy making is done with more consultation, formally as well as informally, and more (although still not very large) contribution of the formal bodies.

2.2. Sources of information

To obtain the information concerning the Flemish level case study, we used the following sources of information.

- policy documents: inaugural statements and governmental agreements (for a list of

Belgian governments, see annex 3), minutes, policy letters (first published in 1995)

- legal documents: laws and decrees (i.e. Flemish laws)

- additional reading: see bibliography, also containing publications of the minister of Education and senior civil servants

- interviews (in alphabetic order, with their current occupation)

Jan Adé, director-general AHOWO, 19 May 1998

Isabelle Cortens, study service VEV, 14 May 1998

Paul Cottenie, co-ordinating commissioner of the colleges, 3 June 1998

Hugo Deckers en Georges Van Sweefelt, ACOD, 2 June 1998

Roger Dillemans, special government commissioner, 27 May 1998

Johan Hoornaert, advisor on educational matters of KU Leuven, 23 June 1998

Gaby Hostens, director-general secondary education, former head of cabinet of the Minister of Education, 8 May 1998

Wim Leybaert, AHOWO - colleges, 16 September 1998

Jos Monballyu, chairman sub-faculty of law KULAK, former member of cabinet of the Minister of Education, 7 July 1998

André Oosterlinck, chairman VLIR, 11 May 1998

Dirk Van Damme, adjunct-head of cabinet of the Minister of Education, 13 May 1998

Gust Van Dongen, COC, 6 May 1998

Noël Vercrusse, AHOWO- universities and scientific research, 20 July 1998

Chapter 3. Contextual factors

3.1. The European dimension

The internationalisation of higher education is an important issue for the Flemish government. The government wants Flemish education to be competitive in an international context. Therefore, a number of measures has been taken which promote the internationalisation (in a broad sense) of higher education.

Participation in European programmes

To promote the participation of Flemish institutions and students in European educational programmes, the Flemish government has established several agencies. At the moment, these are: the Socrates Committee, the Flemish Socrates Agency, the Flemish Lingua Agency, and the Flemish Leonardo da Vinci Agency.

The Socrates Committee is an advisory body that aims at enhancing the Flemish participation in the Socrates-programme. It also has to ensure the coherence of all European programmes at the Flemish level. The Socrates Committee advises on the follow-up of the Socrates-programme, disseminates information about the programme, facilitates the exchange of information and experience, promotes the European dimension to be inserted in adult education, and supports the working out of projects in the framework of the Socrates-programme.

Within the department of Education the Flemish Socrates Agency is established, that co-ordinates the implementation of the Socrates-Programme. For the Lingua-programme there is the Flemish Lingua Agency. The Flemish Leonardo da Vinci Agency was established by the department of Education, the Flemish Unemployment Agency (VDAB), and the Flemish Institute for Entrepreneurship (VIZO).

Implementation of the European directives of 21 December 1989 and 24 July 1992

These directives concern a general system of recognition of higher education diplomas, concluding a vocational training (respectively of three years or more and less than three years). The basic principle is that such diplomas are recognised, but exceptions are possible.

Subsidies to foreign students

In accordance with the relevant European regulations, students of other EU-countries who study in Belgium, have the same rights to subsidies as Belgian students.

Promoting international co-operation

Universities and colleges can conclude international co-operation agreements. The Flemish government provides money for this. Some examples:

- Since 1993 the Flemish government provides 130 million BEF a year to encourage research institutions (i.e. universities) to participate in European research programmes.
- In 1998 98.2 million BEF was provided for international university co-operation projects in the field of education (with Russia, Ukraine, Vietnam and China as priority partners).
- Six co-operation projects within the framework of the "*transborder agreement*" (an agreement between the Netherlands, Flanders, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Nieder-Saksen, and Bremen) are co-financed by the Flemish government for 7.5 million BEF in 1997-1998 and 9.5 million the next year.

Introduction of the European study-point system

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is a system for the recognition of study periods abroad by the higher education institution in the home country. In participating institutions the student work load for a course is expressed in 60 credits a year, subdivided according to the weight of the course units. This system makes it easier to measure and compare the study results of students and to transfer them between institutions.

In Flanders the ECTS is introduced and all courses are divided into 60 credits a year.

Recognition of foreign diplomas

The equivalence of foreign diplomas or certificates with the degrees laid down in the decrees, can be recognised by the Flemish government. The recognition of the full equivalence grants the same judicial consequences to these diplomas or certificates then to the degrees with which they correspond.

Freedom to organise programmes

Autonomy in formulating educational programmes and the organisation of the academic year, grants higher education institutions the possibility to take the educational programmes and time schedules of foreign students into account.

The individually tailored year programme (*individueel aangepast jaarprogramma*) grants the possibility to a student to enrol for a course year in which he/she was unsuccessful, but did attain exemptions or transfer of exam results, and supplement this by course units of the next year.

Additional funding

Next to the funding made available by the European Union for study grants in the framework of the Erasmus-programme, the Flemish Community provides additional funding to finance the Erasmus activities. This additional funding has increased over the years and amounted 30 million BEF in 1996/97. For the academic year 1997-98 an amount of 31 million BEF is provided.

From the above it is clear that the internationalisation of higher education is taking off in Flanders. But the lingua franca of higher education still is Dutch. Participation in higher education can be made dependent on a language exam. In principle foreigners have to show that they understand enough Dutch to follow courses. The decrees of 1991 and 1994 do create the possibility to teach a number of colleges in another language (20 % for universities, unlimited for colleges). Post-academic education can be (and often is) taught in another language. To be complete we must mention that the decrees make it possible to appoint visiting professors.

3.2. Government approach to policy making and state control

When we look at the actual way in which the government tries to steer higher education, we have to make a difference (again) between the period before 1989 and the period from 1989 onwards. Not only the normative conceptions of the government changed over these periods (see paragraph 2.1.2.), the steering model was also subject to change. Both elements are closely linked. We have to make a further division in the period before 1989, namely between state universities, free universities, and colleges. Each of them was 'steered' in another way.

The steering towards universities did not happen in the form of law. “The last framework law was the law of 27 July 1971 on the financing and control of university institutions. The guiding norm for the state universities was the law of 28 April 1953. (...) The legislation that is developed from 1989 onwards, in fact makes up for a lagging behind towards the modern educational reality” (De Groof, 1992-1993). The most important decisions (containing mostly retrenchments) were taken with special royal decrees.

The actual way universities were treated, differed greatly for free and state universities. The state universities were directly subjected to the responsibility of the minister of Education, who was the organising body of state education. Therefore these universities were influenced directly by the features of the political system of that time: unstable due to linguistic troubles and financially restricted because of the increasing public debt. Moreover the strong centralism (everything was decided ‘in Brussels’) caused a strong bureaucratisation. The execution of the decisions was done by the administration, which was politicised. ‘Pluralism’ was guaranteed by political appointments. The bureaucratisation was an expression of the hierarchical structure of state education, with the minister of Education as the centre.

The free universities were relatively autonomous. According to Verhoeven (1982: 131) this can be explained by, on the one hand, the fact that university education has always been seen as necessarily autonomous and organised by private initiative, on the other hand because it was clear that interventions could trigger of irreconcilable conflicts. The government was reluctant with regulation, in order to leave the delicate ideological and linguistic equilibrium in the university sector in peace.

The steering towards colleges had different starting points. In 1958 the (then still limited) non-university higher education sector was made subject to the School Pact. State education was financed entirely by the state. Subsidised schools received grants for their working, their material, and their buildings. Their personnel was entirely paid by the government. In exchange for this governmental funding, the government received the right to control the curricula and the quality of the education of the subsidised schools. These centralist elements also applied to non-university higher education, so the link between this sector and secondary education was confirmed.

In the 1960s and the 1970s the college sector expanded greatly. In the 1980s, when the effects of the economic crisis were felt hard, the government had to impose

restrictions on higher education (also the universities). It introduced among other things rationalisation norms, that caused the number of colleges to drop from 202 in 1983-1984 to 163 in 1988-1989 (Vanderhoeven, 1991).

This short oversight of the governmental steering in the 1970s and 1980s towards each sector of higher education (state universities, free universities, and colleges) indicates that we cannot describe it homogeneously in terms of the steering models of the theoretical framework. Policy towards state universities can best be described as a sovereign state model. The model of the institutional state applies to the free universities. Towards colleges the policy took the form of a sovereign state model. Educational policy as a whole also had features of the segmented state model (see Introduction).

The discontent in Flanders about these steering models, especially the way the state higher education was treated, caused a shift towards the other side when Flanders got the authority over education. Since that time the Flemish government strives to give higher education institutions, not only in words but also in deeds, autonomy and responsibility. With the Decree on universities of 1991 and the Decree on colleges of 1994, the government took an important step towards far-reaching autonomy for all institutions. The Flemish governmental agreement of 17 June 1995 speaks of a radical enlargement of the autonomy and the responsibility for the whole education sector.

From now on, the decrees only impose formal requirements (length of the course, division in cycles, possibilities to abridgement of course duration and so on); the content of education (the course programme) can be decided by the institutions themselves, as was the case in the past for scientific degrees (Verstegen, 1992-1993). The legal minimal programmes for the legal degrees were abolished. The difference between legal and scientific degrees no longer exists.

The government does however not withdraw entirely: "The government creates conditions and sets out quality goals" (Van Den Bossche, 1995: 9); "it proposes minimal goals, promotes certain social priorities, secures a number of vital interests and rights, especially for the weaker, and to that aim provides the necessary resources in exchange for clear agreements" (Van Den Bossche, 1995: 12). In principle control is exercised in retrospect. For that purpose a quality control system was established,

but the application of the system falls under the responsibility of the institutions.

The clear decentralisation in comparison with the period before 1989 has increased the scope for autonomous decision-making by the institutions, but deserves nuance on certain points. The far-reaching autonomy and deregulation that can be found in the normative conception of the government, is not always realised. The autonomy of the institutions is limited on six occasions.

- A first limitation is the assignment of specific study areas and courses to certain institutions. For the universities 18 study areas are specified and for each university the courses and part of courses that it can offer is fixed. For the colleges 11 study areas are specified. They can offer those basic courses and options that are appointed to them by decree.

- The limitation of the number of courses (the scaling-up of colleges) was a result of a governmental decision. The financing mechanism was adapted in such a way, that the small colleges had to merge. After the subsequent mergers, the number of colleges was only 29.

These two elements, restricting study areas and decreasing the number of courses, seem to be the most important limitations to the autonomy of higher education institutions, especially because they can affect the supply of courses. Theoretically the Flemish government can use this as an indirect steering instrument.

- The autonomy of the institutions is limited in third place, at least theoretically, by the introduction of the study point system (see paragraph 3.1.). In practice it seems to be more a source of information for the students than an instrument for influencing the study progress (Verstegen, 1992-1993).

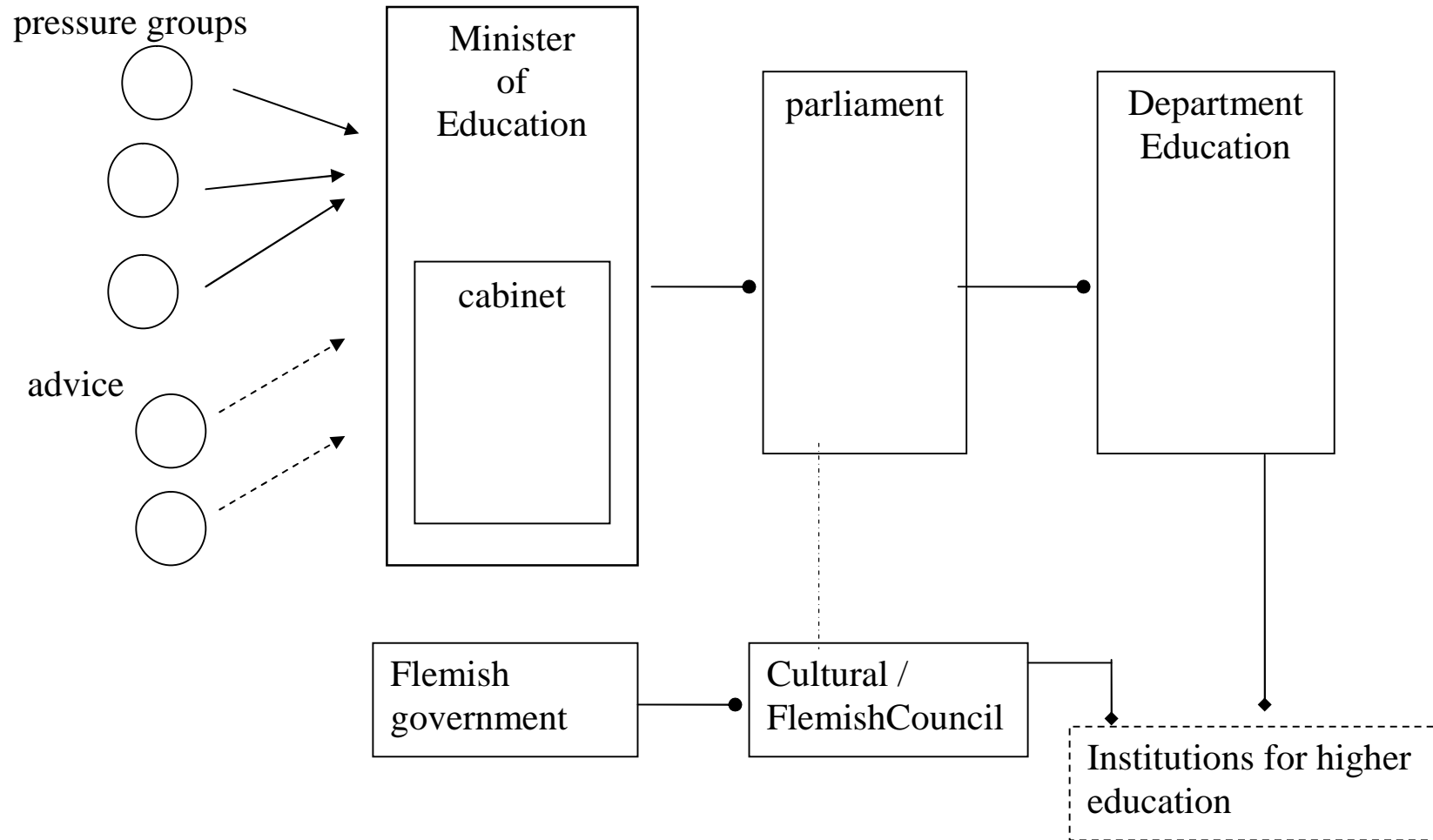
- A fourth limitation is the obligation for colleges to draw up vocational profiles and course profiles based on them. The restriction is in the fact that institutions cannot draw them up independently, but have to do this in dialogue with the occupational field.

- A fifth element is the restriction on the share of the total expenses that can be spent on wages. This share cannot exceed (after a transition period) more than 80 %. In that way at least 20 % can be spent on working costs.
- A sixth limitation of the institutional independence is the appointment of a commissioner at each university and college. The commissioners at the universities have the authority to check if university policy is in line with the relevant laws and decrees and with the criterion of financial equilibrium of the institution. When the commissioner does not approve the policy, he appeals at the Flemish government, that decides if the university policy must be changed or not. For colleges a similar system exists. On top of this, all purchases by the university of goods and services amounting more than 1,250,000 BEF have to be visaed by the commissioner. The university can take the definitive decision. Although the system of commissioners is a clear centralist element, the autonomy of the higher education institutions does not seem to be limited very much by it, because the legal regulations in Flanders grant the institutions relatively much autonomy.

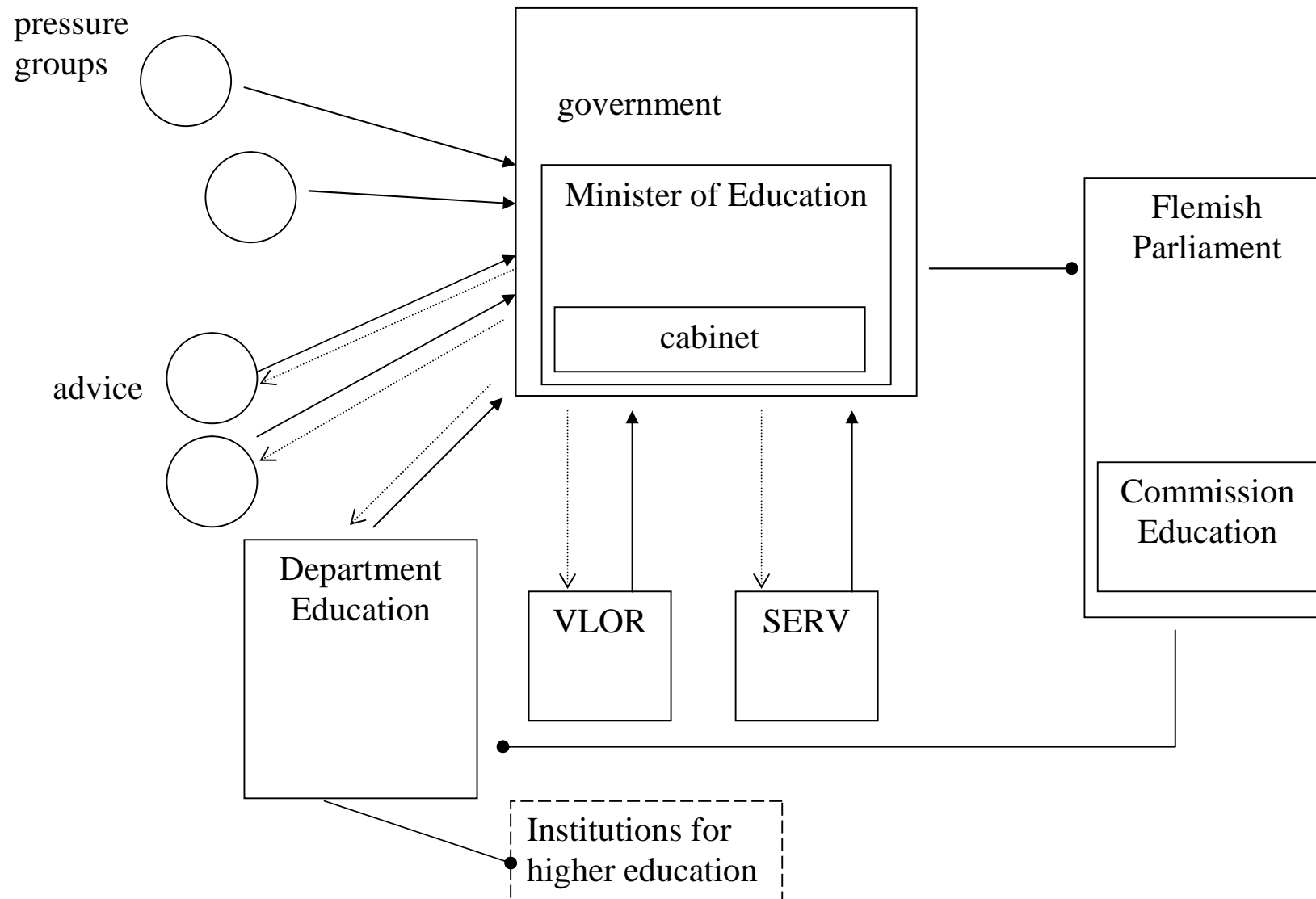
The way of governmental steering of higher education after 1989 differs greatly from the previous period. An important change is that the steering is now (almost) the same towards all higher education institutions. With the special decree of 26 June 1991 the former state universities became their own organising body and their autonomy became largely the same as that of free universities. The regulation on colleges was conceived very similar to that of universities and granted them a similar independence.

The new steering model is conceived more like a market state model. This already shows in the stress being put on 'economistic' values (see paragraph 2.1.2), but can also be seen in the real autonomy that is granted to each institution. The government only provides the financial means, and controls in retrospect. The autonomy is however not total, as was indicated above. In other words, the market state model is only partially applicable to the current situation. This also appears from the elements of the segmented state that are still present in the steering model, like advisory councils in the policy network (see paragraph 2.1.5.).

Annex 1. Scheme 1



Annex 2. Scheme 2



Annex 3. 20 years of Belgian governments

Tindemans I (25 April 1974 - 18 April 1977)

Tindemans II (3 June 1977 - 11 October 1978)

Vanden Boeynants (20 October 1978 - 18 December 1978)

Martens I (3 April 1979 - 15 January 1980)

Martens II (23 January 1980 - 3 April 1980)

Martens III (18 May 1980 - 4 October 1980)

Martens IV (22 October 1980 - 31 March 1981)

Eyskens (6 April 1981 - 21 September 1981)

Martens V (17 December 1981 - 14 October 1985)

Martens VI (28 November 1985 - 15 October 1987)

Martens VII (21 October 1987 - 14 December 1987)

Martens VIII (9 May 1988 - 29 September 1991)

Martens IX (29 September 1991 - 25 November 1991)

Dehaene I (7 March 1992 - 21 May 1995)

Dehaene II (23 June 1995 -)

From Flemish Executive to Flemish Government

Geens I (22 December 1981 - 3 December 1985)

Geens II (10 December 1985 - 2 February 1988)

Geens III (3 February 1988 - 18 October 1988)

Geens IV (18 October 1988 - 7 January 1992)

Van den Brande I (21 January 1992 - 19 October 1992)

Van den Brande II (20 October 1992 - 20 June 1995)

Van Den Brande III (20 June 1995 -)

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